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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000762

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TAGS: PREL LH UP

SUBJECT: LITHUANIAN PM PUSHES UKRAINE'S YANUKOVICH ON EU,
NATO, WTO INTEGRATION

Classified By: Pol/econ chief Rebecca Dunham for reasons 1.4 b,d

Summary

¶1. (C) Lithuania's Prime Minister Gediminas Kirkilas interrupted his holidays August 10 to sell NATO, EU and WTO integration to Ukraine's newly appointed PM Victor Yanukovich. MFA officials present for the meeting called Yanukovich's "open" reaction to their points on EU and, especially, NATO integration "a pleasant surprise." The Lithuanian side reported, however, disappointment with Yanukovich's reluctance on WTO accession. While Yanukovich did not plainly express support (or disapproval) for Ukraine's bid for a NATO Membership Action Plan, he accepted Kirkilas's offer to continue Lithuania's active support on both EU and NATO integration. End Summary.

Lithuanian PM makes impromptu visit to Kiev

¶2. (C) Lithuania's Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and other officials made a quick unplanned trip to Kiev, August 9, to be the first to meet with Ukraine's newly appointed Prime Minister Victor Yanukovich on NATO, EU and WTO integration issues, as well as bilateral issues. The head of the MFA's Eastern Europe Department, Arunas Vinciunas, was present at the meetings. He debriefed us August 11 on Yanukovich's reactions to the international issues.

Lithuania: Yanukovich surprisingly "open" on NATO

¶3. (C) Vinciunas told us that Yanukovich was surprisingly "open" about Ukraine's path to closer integration with NATO. Yanukovich said that Ukraine is not ready for NATO now, and that a referendum on NATO today would fail. Nevertheless, Yanukovich did not express opposition to Ukraine's bid for a Membership Action Plan or eventual accession to NATO. Yanukovich reportedly expressed the need for a public relations campaign to prepare his people for closer NATO integration. Lithuania currently assists Ukraine's Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs with a NATO public relations strategy, and Yanukovich expressed continued acceptance of this assistance.

¶4. (C) According to Vinciunas, Yanukovich told the PM that most people in Ukraine, including its civil servants, only see the military side of NATO; through greater cooperation, Ukrainians might become more familiar with the political benefits of transatlantic integration. Yanukovich said that more training is an absolute necessity for the Ukrainian military. Vinciunas also told us that Yanukovich cited problems stemming from the defense industrial sector in

Ukraine. He said that integrating NATO and ex-Soviet defense industries is difficult but important. Vinciunas reported that Yanukovich would support joint production by existing Ukrainian military suppliers and NATO suppliers.

Lithuania to continue assistance on NATO, EU integration

¶ 15. (C) Lithuania has supported Ukraine's NATO integration politically and with several programs that provide technical support. A Lithuanian advisor posted to the Ukrainian MFA helped write Ukraine's draft Membership Action Plan. Lithuania, in cooperation with its Nordic-Baltic neighbors, also renders technical assistance on planning a public relations campaign to raise support for NATO in Ukraine, based in part on Lithuania's success at raising public support for its own NATO accession several years ago. In a meeting on August 10, the Lithuanian MFA's Head of Security and NATO Policy Department Algis Dabkus told us that Lithuania supports MAP for NATO at the earliest moment, and that Yanukovich's assumption of the PM's post would not change that. While no formal agreement was made during their meeting, Lithuanian PM Kirkilas told Yanukovich that Lithuania would continue to provide support for Ukraine's closer integration to NATO, and Yanukovich accepted that support.

¶ 16. (C) Lithuania provides other technical assistance to Ukraine, notably to Ukraine's EU integration coordination project (financed by the UK). The GOL also provides an ongoing training project to Ukrainian military officers in Vilnius, in which 3 Ukrainian officers (as well as officers from Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) take a six-month course in Vilnius focusing on military

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transformation and NATO accession issues. We note that the MOD's coordinator for this project reported to us on an earlier occasion that Ukraine's military officer's have generally favored NATO accession.

¶ 17. (C) Vinciunas told us that Yanukovich agreed to continue discussions about Lithuania's support for Ukraine's NATO integration during a joint NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting this Autumn. Dabkus additionally inquired about the possibility of having a NATO-Ukraine Foreign Ministers meeting on the margins of the UN General Assembly meeting in September.

Lithuania: Yanukovich's Pragmatic approach to EU-engagement

¶ 18. (C) According to Vinciunas, Yanukovich stressed Ukraine's need for a pragmatic process of closer integration with the EU. He reportedly said that integration strategies had not always "been done right," and that Euro-euphoria had misguided many policies of the would-be EU member states. Yanukovich did not express either support or dissatisfaction with the EU-Ukraine action plan.

Lithuania: Yanukovich bearish on WTO

¶ 19. (C) If the Lithuanian delegation members were pleasantly surprised by Yanukovich's response to their pitch on NATO, they were disappointed with his stance on WTO issues. "His intentions were negative," said Vinciunas. Yanukovich was reportedly lukewarm on the desirability of acceding to the WTO, expressing concern about Ukrainian producers who were struggling with trade liberalization. He told the Lithuanian delegation that he would consider "renegotiating" certain trade protocols that Ukraine has already signed.

Comment

¶10. (C) Interrupting his holiday to be the first foreign official to visit Prime Minister Yanukovich, Lithuania's new PM has showed that the new Lithuanian government intends to continue the activism of its predecessors in the former Soviet Union, both in promoting democracy and in advocating for integration with the EU and NATO. Its continued support for transatlantic integration, both political and through assistance, may prove helpful in steering Yanukovich's policies. While we defer to Embassy Kiev for the definitive view, the view from Vilnius appears to be guardedly optimistic about Ukraine's direction.

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